

# Does New York Know New York?—Its Library, for Instance

By Edward J. O'Brien  
Of wide repute as a judge of short stories, but a judge of public affairs as well.

THE astonishment began on the evening of the day when the armistice was signed. Two Bostonians timidly elbowed their way down Fifth Avenue from Forty-fourth Street to the Public Library. All New York had declared a holiday and was making carnival, but they had a pressing need to fill before they could join the crowd. One of them knew what the New York Public Library could do, the other did not, and was frankly incredulous. He knew what the Boston Public Library did not do. He was a poor editor who had just come to New York and he needed quickly a photograph of Napoleon's house of exile at St. Helena. The Bostonian who knew the New York Public Library said that was easy and that he could have a gelatin print of the picture delivered immediately to the engraver. It was a challenge which the editor accepted.

To drop the third person, for it was a personal matter, we checked our coats and rode upstairs to the general reading room, walked immediately to the open reference shelves and picked out a rare book with the very picture we sought. It was wonderful, for in the city we came from such a book would have been locked up for fear of theft. We were rather surprised, of course, to find the Public Library open on such a night of jubilation, and even more surprised when we walked with some timidity up to the delivery desk and inquired if there was any method by which we could have the desired picture photographed. Three experts immediately sprang up out of the ground and gave us a competent lecture on the most efficient way of preparing a print for rotogravure, promised to have a gelatin print made by the library photostat and to deliver it to the engraver before 11 o'clock the next morning, although it was then close to library closing time. As a crowning evidence of their faith in human nature they agreed to send the editor a bill for services rendered.

It was really most instructive. We learned more about the mysteries of technical processes connected with rotogravure supplements than we had ever known before, and at a slack hour in the greatest holiday night New York had seen since the close of the Civil War there were three experts ready and eager to assist the public with highly specialized information. One of us was glad that he was settling in New York, the other went ruefully back to Boston, and is occasionally heard even now murmuring "photostat" in his sleep.



But he decided that the adventure would not end here. He wanted to know why such wonderful things should happen to him, and he decided to stay over in New York two days longer to find out. And he found, strangely enough, the library was still glad to help him. He saw everything but the boiler plant, and he compared it with Boston. As a result he has almost decided to move to New York.

Before going further I wish to express my gratitude to Mr. Anderson, the director; Mr. Lydenberg, chief of the reference department; Mr. Harper, acting chief of the branch library department and the circulation department; and to Mr. McComb, chief of the reference reading room, for their cordial and painstaking cooperation in making this article a success.

## Alert Where Boston Is Mediæval

It should be clearly understood at the outset that the New York Public Library is an organization uniting two equally important departments. The central reference library, in which the books are not available for outside circulation, is a separate unit from the circulation department and branch library system in which books circulate freely outside the building. The two departments present very different administrative problems. The central reference library is a scholar's library in which the old Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations are now united for the first time. This library is supported by endowment and occupies its present magnificent building simply as a perpetual tenant of the City of New York. The city is its kindly landlord. The branch libraries and their books are now one system mainly supported by the city, which appropriates annually about \$900,000 for that purpose. Here, too, many local libraries have been fused into one administrative system. I shall consider the two systems separately, always remembering that in practice they are to be regarded as a single unit of service, not only to the citizens of New York, but to the whole country.

The main reference collection, which is second only to the Library of Congress in the number of books, and which surpasses the Library of Congress in many fields, is freely open for consultation and general reading to any reader without an introduction. To those who know the restrictions which obtain in the British Museum, the Bibliothèque Nationale, the Bodleian Library, the Harvard College Library and most other great collections with which the New York Public Library may otherwise be fittingly compared, this will seem remarkable. But the New York idea of democracy has obtained so long that most citizens of New York probably take it for granted. A large part of this collection is ranged on open shelves for direct consultation by the reader. The visitor from Boston is at once impressed not only by the large extent of this collection and the catholicity of choice which it reveals, but by the fact that it is kept up to date. Inspection of a single range of books immediately shows that experts in their own

special fields watch this collection from day to day and are quick to add to it the latest contributions to knowledge in every branch of human activity. It is in refreshing contrast to the reference collection in the Boston Public Library, which was selected more than twenty-five years ago and is now largely obsolete.

But there are also many special libraries in the building freely open to the public, and in these, as Mr. Anderson pointed out to me, it has been a point of honor to see that the librarians in charge have at least the same standing in their particular fields as an assistant professor in such a university as Columbia or Harvard. I know of no other library in the United States of which this could be said truthfully. It carries on honorably in this respect the great tradition of the British Museum, whose department custodians are, for the most part, men of letters whom England is thus proud to honor.

Did space permit I should like to enlarge on the unique special collections of the New York Public Library, but I must content myself with calling attention to the fact that in the central building the scholar will find the largest and richest collection of Americana in the world.

## Benefits of Scientific Arrangement

Before entering the general reading room, where all these treasures are placed immediately at the reader's disposal, one enters the spacious catalogue room, and, if he is a Bostonian, is at once amazed at the service which is placed at his disposal. Not only does he find a complete card catalogue under one alphabet of the New York Public Library's reference collection, but on the opposite wall he discovers an equally complete catalogue of the resources of the Library of Congress. This catalogue has a bibliographical importance greater than at first appears. When it is remembered that, as a condition of American copyright, one copy of each book published in this country must be deposited in the Library of Congress, the tremendous bibliographical value of this catalogue will be at once perceived.

But to return to the catalogue of your own Public Library. A Bostonian at once recognizes several startling features in which your catalogue is superior. Not only does it contain a complete record by author and title of every book in the library, but it indexes by subject under the same alphabet every magazine article in the library's vast files, and this magazine index is so recent that it includes last month's periodicals. Moreover, the special subject divisions are exhaustively catalogued and grouped much more fully under main divisions than in our Boston Library. For example, the reader who wishes to know the precise resources of the New York Public Library in French fiction, Spanish poetry or Gaelic folk lore will find all the individual works on these subjects separately grouped as a unit of the main catalogue. The advantage of this thoughtfulness to the reader who is not already an expert in the subject which he is looking up will be at once apparent. The scholar may also discover at once by quickly running over the cards what special resources the New York Public Library has to offer which his own library in Boston, Chicago or Brooklyn does not offer him.

Having selected the books which he needs, he writes out on call slips furnished to him the shelf mark, author and title of the book, and signs the slip with his name and address. If the library has several editions of the book and he has a special preference for one of them he may indicate this fact on the slip.

When he has filled out the slips, he takes them to a desk in the same room, where they are carefully examined by the attendant in charge, who is specially trained for this purpose, and if there are any obvious errors on a slip they are pointed out to him for correction. Such forethought as this in the Boston Public Library would save much time and friction not only to the reader, but to the library staff.

If no obvious errors appear on the call slips, they are filed and sent at once by pneumatic tube to the correct book stack, and the reader is given a card with a number on it. Half of these cards have even numbers, and half have odd numbers. These numbers bear no relation to seat numbers

## Every Branch a Combined Popular University and Centre of Good American Citizenship in a True Democracy of Learning

In the hall, but simply direct the reader to a desk either to the left or right of the central issue desk. The advantage of this system, when the hall is crowded, is to direct the flow of readers evenly either to the left or right hand side of the great room, according to the congestion problem which arises. If, however, a reader expresses a preference as to which end of the hall he wishes to work in, or if he wishes to be near certain open reference shelves, his request is honored at once.

Should he wish to have his books delivered by a page to a special seat in the hall he may write the number of the seat on his slips, but as delivery is more prompt if he waives this service, the great majority of readers probably prefer to do so.

Before sending the reader's slips to the appropriate stacks, the attendant in the catalogue room who files them writes on each slip the number of the card with which the reader has been provided, and also the total number of slips which the reader has filed. The reader then enters either the left or right section of the general reading room, as his card may indicate, and sits down in front of an electric indicator. When his books are ready the number of his card is flashed on the electric indicator, and the books are delivered to him immediately, whereupon he may take them to any vacant seat in the hall, on condition that he returns them to the desk before leaving the room.



In the catalogue room there is an information desk at which an expert is ready to assist any reader who is unfamiliar with the catalogue or desires any special information as to his privileges or as to the technique of using the library. At this desk a surprising amount of miscellaneous knowledge must be instantly available, and I have never known the attendant to fail

in giving what is often service prompted by an unreasonable demand.

I was afforded an opportunity to examine a large number of call slips, the books of which had been delivered, and found that the average time of delivery was from eleven to sixteen minutes. An admirable innovation of the New York Library is the use of time clocks, which stamp on each slip the exact moment when it is filed and the exact moment when the book is ready for delivery to the reader.

As the books in the reference collection of the New York Public Library do not, under any circumstances, circulate outside the building, the chances of delivery to the reader are very much greater than in most large libraries serving a great metropolitan population. Before a book is reported to a reader as absolutely not available a very good reason must be given to the officer in charge by those who have searched for it. If the book is definitely and apparently irremediably missing, which does not happen often, the fact is noted, and after a brief period of precautionary waiting its catalogue card is removed.

Mention should be made of the facilities for reserving books afforded to students. Any reader may have reserved for him from day to day a reasonable number of books necessary for continuous study, subject to the needs and convenience of other readers. Such books are held in the main reading room, and if called for by other readers in the absence of the student reserving them, are issued to those readers on the understanding that they be returned to the desk when the original reservation slips are put in them again. This is in pleasant contrast to the system at the Boston Public Library, where such books, if called for by another reader, are lost to the original reader.

Of the photostat service I have already spoken. So far as I know, this service is unique in American libraries. Its promptness and scientific accuracy are noteworthy, and the fact that the service is being used widely and is indispensable is attested by the many orders which come to the library from all over the country by letter and telegram. It is a fair restriction which provides that the library will not undertake ordinary commercial work. The photographs are

made at cost, and by means of it many of the library's treasures are rendered accessible to libraries and scholars at a great distance from New York, with a great saving of travelling expenses and laborious research.

As the library is one of the largest book buyers in the world, its method of selecting books should prove of interest. Contrary to the practice of the Boston Public Library, all books are selected by noted experts in their field. The purchase of books published in America is not limited to one bookseller or jobber, but distributed equally throughout the New York book trade. The library has an arrangement with the chief booksellers by which one copy of every book published in America, when procurable through ordinary channels, is automatically submitted to the library for approval on the date of publication. These books are instantly classified by subject and allotted to experts in the library service for quick decision. Such decisions are usually made within a couple of days and are final.



Furthermore, experts continually read all foreign book catalogues, trade journals and bibliographical lists, and make their selections instantly. If the book is already bound, as is the case with most English and American books, the volume is carefully catalogued, and is available for public use from ten to fourteen days after publication. If it requires binding, this is done by the library's special binding service with remarkable promptitude, and the book is available for public use, as a general rule, about one month after its purchase by the library.

The question of amateur censorship, which is so unfortunate an influence in most large public libraries, does not enter here. If a book is a contribution to knowledge or to creative literature or the arts, it is at once added to the reference collection, though if its influence is likely to be harm-

ful to the young or untrained reader, suitable precautions are taken by the library staff to see that its use is not abused.

I had a welcome opportunity to visit the stacks of the central building, and was compelled to admire their wise arrangement with regard to quick service, lighting and accurate book arrangement.

When the building in Forty-second Street was first planned the New York Public Library was able to take advantage of the lessons learned by other architects' mistakes. It was decided to place the main reading room on the top floor, on the assumption that the reader who was in earnest would be willing to go as far as possible from the street, and in the hope, which has been borne out admirably by events, that the mere idler and foot warmer, who crowds out serious readers in most libraries, would be discouraged before he got there. For the same reason a much smaller appropriation is awarded annually for the purchase of newspapers, as experience has shown that the newspaper room of a large library tends to degenerate into a tramps' shelter. Furthermore, the newspaper room has been thoughtfully placed on the ground floor.

## The Electric Carrier System

The stacks which occupy the main portion of the central library building are arranged in tiers directly under the main reading room, and brightly illuminated by natural light. A system of electric book carriers descends from the central desk in the main reading room to each stack, and books are directly loaded and unloaded from dumbwaiters running to and fro between the main reading room and each stack. Each stack is in charge of a separate superintendent, assisted by a corps of ladies, who procure the books directly from the shelves and transfer them to the appropriate electric carrier. One of the most vexatious features of the Boston Public Library and many other libraries is the distance from the stacks to the main reading room and the excessive number of hand carriers necessary to handle the complicated machinery required to find a book and deliver it to the reader. These complications are reduced to a minimum in the New York Public Library through the excellence of its administrative system. In each stack there is a special shelf list showing the arrangement of books on this shelf, and this is an added precaution against the misplacing of books. Only the most experienced attendants are permitted to replace books on the shelves, as to all intents and purposes a misplaced book is a lost book in a collection as vast as that of the New York Public Library.

The visitor cannot but admire the admirable esprit de corps of the library staff, their friendly and helpful human relations to one another and to the public and their perpetual good will and ambition for the library's betterment. In this respect they serve as a counsel of perfection for other libraries.

I wish that I had space to speak of the many other special services which the New York Public Library renders to the public—its remarkably extensive periodical collections, its linguistic treasures, its special library for the blind, in charge of specially trained attendants; its art galleries, print collections and exhibition rooms, and the valuable bibliographical lists which it publishes. But the little which I have outlined is surely enough to show why a mere Bostonian is envious of the riches which New Yorkers often take entirely for granted.

## Every Branch a Public University

Of your branch library service I am hesitant to speak. The sense of leadership necessary to weld together into an organic whole the vast number of small independent circulating libraries and reference collections previously scattered over the various boroughs of New York must have been tremendous. To resolve local differences of opinion, to study the social problems presented by such a vast and unorganized welter of communities and to bring new and untrained immigrant publics to such public libraries was a feat which would have taxed the energies of the greatest administrative leaders. Even as it is, it requires the active cooperation of men and

women having expert knowledge of practically every race and country on the globe. Such libraries had to be not only Yiddish, Bohemian, Italian, Russian or Syrian libraries, with the special resources and training that these connote, but they had to be melting pots of Americanism in order to fulfill completely what they really are—the people's university.

I wish, for example, that I could take you down to the Seward Park branch of the New York Public Library on a busy afternoon. I could show you what is practically a library, college, settlement house, lecture foundation, clubroom and children's recreation room so admirably and efficiently conducted that there is no friction or fault to achieve the end which is sought. That end is to bring Yiddish and Russian literature to the most exacting of the Jewish intelligentsia, while at the same time acting as the first and most potent introduction of the immigrant to American ideals of life. I found there no attempt to destroy the foundations of Jewish and Russian culture, which are the richest gift that these immigrants have brought to our American life, but on the contrary, to develop them to their utmost potentialities for the benefit of American citizenship, and to use them as a basis upon which to interpret the American democratic ideal which we have to offer them in return.

On the afternoon when I visited the branch, in what was described to me as a quiet lull in the day's work, there were hundreds of keenly alert children making the uttermost use of a children's collection more extensive and well chosen than that of the main library in Boston. I was told that the library cooperates with the other social organizations of the district in every possible way. The following instance will illustrate my point, though it is less valid now than before the war shut off the great tide of European immigration: It has been the custom of one Hebrew organization in the district to provide the librarian of this branch regularly with the name of every new immigrant from Europe who has come to reside in the district. Every informal effort was then made to inform this resident, who rarely could speak English, that there was a national library in his own language entirely at his disposal, and that it wished to cooperate with him in every possible way to make him acquainted with his new environment and to assist his material success. In this manner, the library has been able to come into personal relations with practically every immigrant a few days after he has landed, to counsel him wisely, and to integrate him into the social life of his neighborhood. This prevents him from making a wrong start, while, on the other hand, no attentions are impressed upon him in such a way as to make them unwelcome to him. The library staff feels that it has more to learn than to teach and is keenly aware of the vulgarity of condescension.



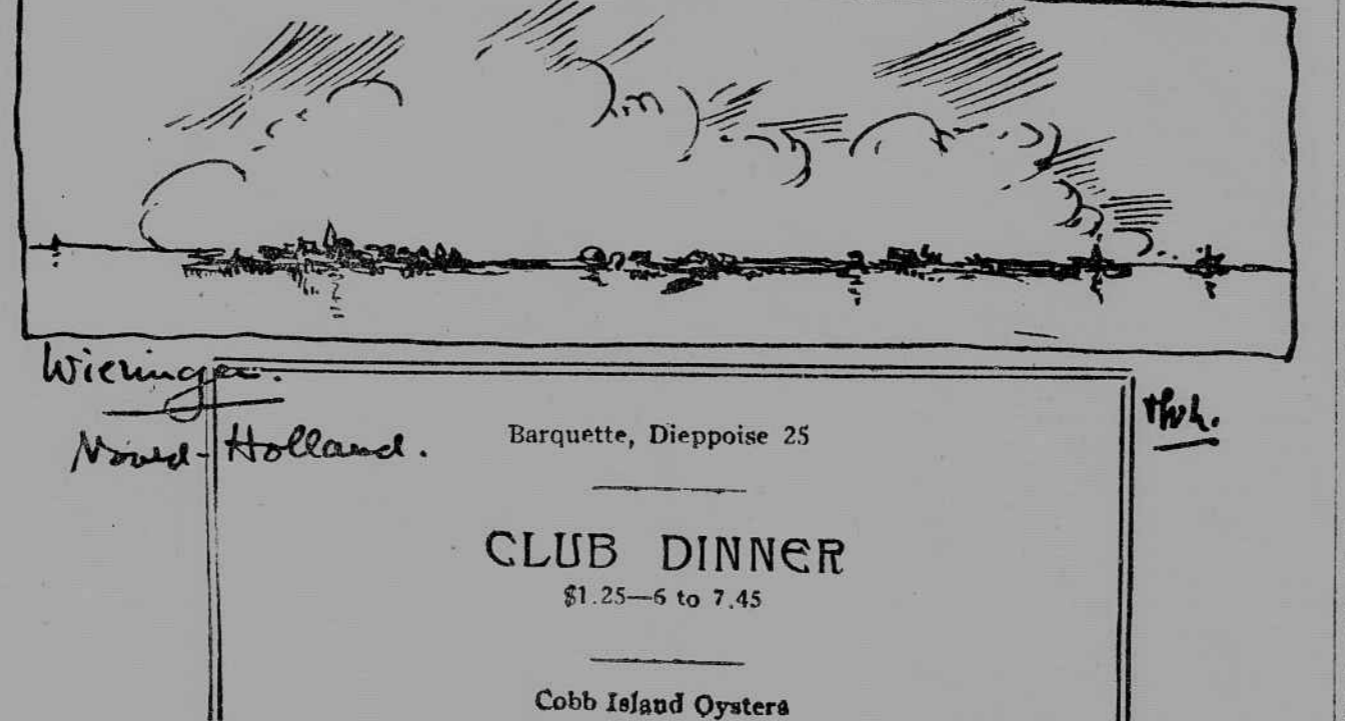
In the matter of popular fiction, for which there seems likely to be a general demand, even though the books are of somewhat ephemeral literary character, the library is less conservative than most other large metropolitan libraries. The books are bought in suitable numbers, but not replaced when they are worn out. The library is also less conservative in the matter of censorship than many other libraries, though special care is taken to avoid purchasing books of a destructive and immoral tendency for general circulation. The problem is usually solved by purchasing reference copies, if the book is of literary value, and imposing suitable limitations on their consultation by readers.

Wisely, I think, the library makes no attempt to duplicate the special collections of the Columbia University Library, the American Museum of Natural History and other special libraries which are open to the serious student.

## A Catalogue of Library Merits

There are many more points which I should like to take up, but as a pilgrim from Boston I must not begin to preach, and I think the best thing I can do in closing is to summarize briefly some of the many advantages which New York enjoys over other cities in this respect, and particularly over Boston. Your library has no amateur reading committee of uncultivated ladies who serve without pay for the privilege of seeing the new books a fortnight before you do; you have a reference collection on open shelves in your main reading room beside which the Bates Hall collection in the Boston Public Library is mediæval; you have access to a much larger collection of current periodicals; you may see the important new books immediately, and have them delivered to you in half the time taken by other libraries; you have good ventilation, restful lights and a scholarly atmosphere; your books are seldom reported as not available for use; you have a much larger purchasing fund for new books than most libraries; you have expert advisers to guide you and no censorship to hinder your intellectual development, and the spirit of service is strong in the staff which administers to your wants. Your library represents the best standards of the American Library Association, to which the rank and file of the staff in our Boston Public Library is actively hostile; you have no highly developed library union to commercialize the standards of your service, and to trail them in the mud of city politics; and, best of all, the director of your library is assumed by his trustees to be a competent executive with freedom to act as he thinks best and to develop the utmost potentialities of library service. Such as it is today, the administration of the New York Public Library is the norm of excellence for the United States, if not for the world. That is a proud distinction which a Bostonian can only envy and seek to emulate by a comparison which is surely not invidious.

## For One Who Dwelt in Marble Halls



Wieringen Island, North Holland, present abode of a onetime Crown Prince of Imperial Germany. Sketched from memory, on a dinner card, by H. W. V. L. With humblest apologies to a well-beloved club.

## On the Heels of the Hun in Luxemburg

By Wilbur Forrest  
Tribune Cable Service

LUXEMBURG, Nov. 21 (delayed).—The Grand Duchess herself and all the Grand Duchesses's men, women and children turned out to-day to honor America and the Allies. It was the greatest day in Luxemburg's history, during which Luxemburg's polyglot little population of 25,000 souls packed the streets of their little city to see the war-soiled and hardened American troops parade.

They cheered our soldiers, French soldiers and everything Allied until the German signs on the shop windows seemed to blush with shame. They "vived" in French, "hoched" in German and "Heep! Heep! Hooraay" in English from the city's gates to the National Palace, showing indisputable satisfaction in their riddance of the Germans who have abused their neutrality since 1914.

The last stragglers of the German army left the city in the early hours to-day. American officers entered before noon, preparing for the afternoon festivities, where, in General Pershing's staff officers, the beautiful young Duchesses—probably the most beautiful young Duchesses in all Europe—Luxemburg's army, her military band, her boy and girl scouts and lastly, grizzled veterans, the American 18th Infantry Regiment of the 1st Division, with its regimental band, were the principal actors.

With the utmost respect to the city of Luxemburg, whose trials during four years as a neutral were dominated by civilization's now vanquished enemy, to-day's stage setting might have been taken from "Gaustruck," with a little of the "Merry Widow" opera combined.

passing first neat residences in the outskirts with a sense of amazement after many months in a country shattered by war's devastation. Brownstone fronts that would credit Fifth Avenue greet the eye. Then you enter business thoroughfares with gayly decorated store windows jutting out the sidewalks and streets too immaculate to be true. Great fags—horizontal bars of red, white and light blue—of the Grand Duchy hang from every window and festoon themselves across the streets. Here and there American and French flags, the former handmade, with from five to fifty stars, according to the maker's conception, hang out. Pictures of the Kaiser, Crown Prince, Ludendorff and Hindenburg are conspicuous by their absence from the store windows, while Pershing, Joffre, Foch and Pétain and Wilson smile forth with victorious countenances. Luxemburg artists are mostly responsible for the pictures, because Germans controlled incoming lithographs of these Allied notables until yesterday.

Block after block had so dressed itself to-day when the Americans began to arrive. Passing down the main thoroughfare, which widens occasionally to accommodate small squares, each with a statue of some national hero, you arrive at the National Palace, a brownstone structure with slate-tiled roof and fronted with second floor galleries whose decorative iron scroll balustrades jut out a trifle over the street.

Below in the street is Luxemburg's little army—every man in blue dress parade uniform, ample red striped trousers, braided tunics, hats similar to those of our West Point cadets—standing at rigid attention, with polished bayonets scintillating in the afternoon sun; officers dressed even more elaborately, with shining swords un-

sheathed, waiting the moment of the arrival of the American commander in chief.

Crowds line both sides of the street, talking volubly in French, German, Italian, Flemish or whatever mother tongue pleases most.

Some one shouts "Vive!" and from the narrow side street through scattering spectators emerges a war-soiled American captain astride an American Western cow pony with one white eye. Then a big automobile half filled with flowers, showing four stars on the windshield, follows. Behind them another, and General Pershing amid cheers steps out and with a long salute reviews Luxemburg's army. General Hines and several colonels accompanying Pershing pass inside the driveway of the palace, while Luxemburg's elaborately uniformed band plays "Yankee Doodle." The music has that soothing flow which brings back the opera stage setting.

Then she appears on the balcony, slim, young, pretty, talking rapidly to broad-shouldered, erect-figured Pershing, who might well be the hero of the piece. His smart army cap hides his silver gray hair; his soldierly bearing bespeaks youth. General Hines is standing near by, talking to another young woman, possibly a sister of the twenty-year-old Duchess, and staff officers conversing with uniformed Luxemburg army officials up there complete the gallery picture.

To have seen the pretty young Luxemburg girls separate themselves from the crowd and trip gayly singing along the pavements would have startled no American present who has seen on our stage the conception of small European nations with their gayly dressed soldiers and the heroine mixed with plenty of waltzy music; but the picture suddenly changed. Cheers up the street announce the approaching sound of horses' feet, followed by the steady tramp of our infantry marching four abreast.

Officers and men alike carried flowers as the gayest part of their make-up. Soiled, sombre, khaki uniforms told of hard battles and as they passed a doughboy hand appeared, stopped in a side street and played as the men marched.

This was the 18th Infantry, whose soldiers put their feet on the soil of France for the first time at St. Nazaire on June 26, 1917. I saw them there, saw them march through Paris, 60 per cent raw recruits, saw them enter the Toul sector for emergency training and emerge in March, 1918, hardened soldiers, when in the 1st Brigade Division they paraded before Secretary of War Baker and General Pershing with a bulldog swing to their shoulders.

These were the blackest Allied days, when Baker rushed back word to the War Department that red tape must be eliminated if American troops were to reach France in sufficient time to save the Allied cause. To-day these veterans are marching victoriously through Luxemburg to Germany, but since March, 1918, they have taken Caen, they have made history for our army in the Chateau Thierry sector, then at St. Mihiel, again at Verdun and then on November 1 in the drive toward Sedan which broke the hinge of the German army's grasp on France and sent it reeling back toward Germany, leading to the Kaiser's abject capitulation.

America's 1st Division, whereof the 18th Infantry is a part, missed no blow for victory in the entire war, and it was in its honor that the 18th was cheered through the Luxemburg streets to-day.

When it finished passing the palace local boy drills and scouts followed, and then the beautiful Duchess, the broad-shouldered generals and their retinue disappeared from the gallery and Luxemburg's army marched away and the crowd dispersed through the streets, cheering every French or American officer who remained among them.

While representatives of the great republics of France and America were enthusiastically welcomed, only faint cheers were heard for the beautiful Duchess, whose alleged apathy toward the popular movement for a break in diplomatic relations when the Germans violated Luxemburg's neutrality in 1914 is said to have minimized her popularity among the people. From the talk heard in the streets to-day one would be led to believe that little Luxemburg leans toward republicanism. This theory is strengthened by posters conspicuously placed throughout the city disclaiming any responsibility on the part of the populace for Luxemburg's apparent passiveness toward German occupation during the war. The posters were put in place by the Luxemburg Citizens' Union.

The first Americans in the city of Luxemburg included Brigadier General Frank Parker of the 1st Division, who came on Wednesday, before the enemy had wholly evacuated the city.